



ANIMAL CRUELTY'S LINK TO OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

During the 1990's, changes in state anti-cruelty laws reflected a shift in how most people perceive cruelty toward animals. As of May 2011, 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have enacted felony animal cruelty provisions, up from just six jurisdictions in 1990. One contributing reason for this shift is evidence of a strong correlation between animal abuse and violence toward humans.

STUDIES SHOW UNDENIABLE LINK

When humans or animals in a home are abused or neglected, it creates a warning signal that others in the household may not be safe. Numerous documented studies show that there is a direct link between acts of cruelty to animals and violence toward others, including child abuse, spousal abuse, elder abuse and other violent behavior. Key findings include:

- In homes where serious animal abuse has occurred, there may be an increased probability that some other type of family violence is also happening.¹
- Threats of or actual abuse of a companion animal may be used to intimidate, coerce, or control women and children to remain in and/or be silent about their abusive situation, out of concern for the safety of their pet.²
- If a child is cruel to animals it may be a sign that serious abuse or neglect has been inflicted on the child; children who witness animal abuse are at greater risk of becoming abusers themselves.³
- If a child exhibits aggressive or sexualized behavior toward animals it may be associated with later abuse of humans, unless the behavior is recognized and stopped.⁴
- Violent offenders incarcerated in maximum-security prisons are significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed childhood acts of cruelty toward pets.⁵
- A study undertaken by the MSPCA and Northeastern University found that 70 percent of people who committed violent crimes against animals also had records for other crimes. Compared with a control group of their neighbors, animal abusers were five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people, four times more likely to commit property crimes, and three times more likely to have a record for drug or disorderly-conduct offenses.⁶

¹ DeViney, E., Dickert, J. and Lockwood, R. "The care of pets within child abusing families," *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*, 4, pp. 321-9 (1983)

² Ponder, C. and Lockwood, R.. "Cruelty to animals and family violence," *Training Key*, 526, pp. 1-5. (Published by the International Association of Chiefs of Police) (2000)

³ Tapia, F.. "Children who are cruel to animals," *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 22, pp. 68-72 (1971).

⁴ Ascione, F. R.. "Children who are cruel to animals: a review of research and implications for developmental psychopathology," *Anthrozoos*, 6, pp. 226 - 47 (1993)

⁵ Felthous, A. R. and Kellert, S. R.. "Childhood Cruelty to Animals and Later Aggression Against People: A Review," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 144:6, pp. 710-16 (1987)

⁶ Arluke, A., Levin, J., & Luke, C. "Cruelty to Animals and Other Crimes" Massachusetts Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals & Northeastern University (1997)